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July 25, 1980

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Presidential Directive/NSC-59

TO: The Vice President
The Secretary of Defense

ALSO: The Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT: Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy (C)

In PD-18, I directed a follow-on study of our targeting policy for nuclear forces. I have reviewed the results and considered their implications for maintaining deterrence in the present decade, particularly in light of the growing Soviet strategic weapons arsenal and its capabilities. (S)

The most fundamental objective of our strategic policy remains nuclear deterrence. I reaffirm the directive of PD-18 to that effect. The purpose of this directive is to outline policies and actions in the nuclear force employment field to secure that continuing objective. (S)

Our strategic nuclear forces must be able to deter nuclear attacks not only on our own country but also on our forces overseas, as well as on our friends and allies, and to contribute to deterrence of non-nuclear attacks. To continue to deter in an era of strategic nuclear equivalence, it is necessary to have nuclear (as well as conventional) forces such that in considering aggression against our interests any adversary would recognize that no plausible outcome would represent a victory on any plausible definition of victory. To this end and so as to preserve the possibility of bargaining effectively to terminate the war on acceptable terms that are as favorable as practical, if deterrence fails initially, we must be capable of fighting successfully so that the adversary would not achieve his war aims and would suffer costs that are unacceptable, or in any event greater than his gains, from having initiated an attack. (C)

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Review on May 15, 2000

Reason for Extension: NSC 1.13(e)

Downgraded Per per 6/12/09 NSC Mr.


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NARA 2 Date 7/24/12

The employment of nuclear forces must be effectively related to operations of our general purpose forces. Our doctrines for the use of forces in nuclear conflict must insure that we can pursue specific policy objectives selected by the National Command Authorities at that time, from general guidelines established in advance. (S)

These requirements form the broad outline of our evolving counter-vailing strategy. To meet these requirements, improvements should be made to our forces, their supporting C3 and intelligence, and their employment plans and planning apparatus, to achieve a high degree of flexibility, enduring survivability, and adequate performance in the face of enemy actions. The following principles and goals should guide your efforts in making these improvements. (S)

Pre-planned options. The Single Integrated Operational Plan will provide pre-planned targeting for strikes against the Soviet Union, its allies and its forces. It should provide for retaliatory strikes that will be effective, even if the Soviets attack first, without warning, and in a manner designed to reduce our capability as much as possible. It will be developed with flexible sub-options that will permit, to the extent that survival of C3 allows, sequential selection of attacks from among a full range of military targets, industrial targets providing immediate military support, and political control targets, while retaining a survivable and enduring capability that is sufficient to attack a broader set of urban and industrial targets. [In addition, to the maximum extent possible, pre-planned options will be provided for selection in response to specific, lesser contingencies (including attacks on Cuba, SRV and North Korea as appropriate). 

While it will remain our policy not to rely on launching nuclear weapons on warning that an attack has begun, appropriate pre-planning, especially for ICBMs that are vulnerable to a preemptive attack, will be undertaken to provide the President the option of so launching. (TS)

Flexibility. In addition to pre-planned options we need an ability to design nuclear employment plans on short notice in response to the latest and changing circumstances. This capability must be comprehensive enough to allow rapid construction of plans that integrate strategic force employment with theater nuclear force employment and general purpose force employment for achieving theater campaign objectives and other national objectives when pre-planned response options are not judged suitable in the circumstances. (S)

To assure that we can design such plans, our goal should be to have the following capabilities on a continuing basis in peacetime, during crises, and during protracted conflict:

- Staff capabilities, within all unified and specified commands which have nuclear forces, to develop operational plans on short notice and based on the latest intelligence.

- Staff capabilities at the seat of Government to support the NCA for coordinating and integrating the nuclear force employment for all commands.
- Intelligence and target development capabilities which permit damage assessment and acquisition of a broad range of targets, fixed and mobile, on a timely basis for military operations. (S)

Reserve Forces. Pre-planned options should be capable of execution while leaving a substantial force in secure reserve and capable of being withheld for possible subsequent use. The forces designated for the reserve should be the most survivable and enduring strategic systems consistent with the need for a flexible and varied reserve force capable of being effectively employed against a wide target spectrum and withheld if necessary for a prolonged period. The secure reserve force will be increased over the next two years to support a more flexible execution of our countervailing strategy. This will be done according to the Secretary of Defense's guidance. (TS)

Targeting categories. Overall targeting planning appropriate to implement a countervailing strategy will result in a capability to choose to put the major weight of the initial response on military and control targets. Military targets must be selected for the purpose of destroying enemy forces or their ability to carry out military operations. Strategic and theater nuclear forces should to the extent feasible be used in combination with, and in support of, general purpose forces to achieve that objective. (S)

More specifically, the following categories of military targets, with appropriate sub-options for different theaters, should be covered in planning:

- strategic and theater nuclear forces, including nuclear weapons storage;
- military command, control, communications, and intelligence capabilities;
- all other military forces, stationary and mobile;
- industrial facilities which provide immediate support to military operations during wartime. (TS)

In addition, pre-planned options, capable of relatively prolonged withhold or of prompt execution, should be provided for attacks on the political control system and on general industrial capacity. (TS)

There must be extensive and effective coverage in the pre-planned options of all categories. Methods of attack on particular targets should be chosen to limit collateral damage to urban areas, general

industry and population targets outside these categories, consistent with effectively covering the objective target, and, where appropriate, overall plans should include the option of withholds to limit such collateral damage. (TS)

Command, Control and Communications, and Intelligence. Flexibility in contingency planning and in operations will be highly dependent on our C³I capabilities, including their ability to acquire targets, assess damage, and survive attack. Strategic stability in an era of essential equivalence depends as much on survivability, endurance and reconstitutability of C³I capabilities as it does on the size and character of strategic arsenals. (C)

PD/NSC-53 directs that our C³I programs and our guidance to telecommunications common carriers support the development and maintenance of such capabilities. In addition, PD/NSC-41 directs that we seek greater continuity of government should deterrence fail. Implementation of PD/NSC-53 and PD/NSC-41 must be pursued in parallel with that of this employment directive. (C)

The relationship of acquisition policy to employment policy. Our acquisition programs must be evaluated in terms of their support for the employment policy ordered by this directive. The required flexibility, survivability, endurance, and target destruction capability must be taken into account in developing programs for acquiring nuclear weapons systems, and their supporting C³I systems, needed to support our countervailing strategy. (S)

Implementation. As new targeting capabilities are developed, and as our operational staffing support change to meet the foregoing directives, they must be reviewed and tested to validate their feasibility and soundness. For that purpose:

- At least two exercises involving the National Command Authorities should be conducted each year to evaluate our capabilities and our employment doctrines.
- Continued study and analysis of means to improve and refine our countervailing strategy of general conflict should be conducted by the Department of Defense.
- The results of these exercises, studies and analysis will provide the bases for modification and any further development of employment and acquisition policy.
- A report will be rendered to the President at least annually on our employment plans, including, but not limited to, on the size and capability of the reserve forces, the degree of flexibility available,

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limiting factors in achieving flexibility, and the status of programs to provide improvements.

- Any change or new pre-planned options will be submitted to the President for his review and approval, in accordance with current procedures. (TS)

NSDM-242 is superseded by this directive. (U)

Jimmy Carter

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